

IICKHO NESA/SO/P 6981 SPECIAL SEARCH

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<> TAKE 1 OF 2 -- <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><>: REBELS KILL USSR AIRMAN IN DRA AIRFIELD ATTACK

PM091406

<> MOSCOW <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><> IN RUSSIAN 8 JAN 84 SECOND EDITION P 2
 ((REPORT BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL V. SKRIZHALIN, KRASNAYA
 ZVEZDA CORRESPONDENT, UNDER THE RUBRIC "ON AFGHAN SOIL":
 "MOMENTS OF HEROISM"))

((TEXT)) THE DISTRICT OF KHOWST IN THE SOUTHEAST OF AFGHANISTAN
 JUTS INTO PAKISTANI TERRITORY LIKE A KIND OF PENINSULA. FOR A
 LONG TIME THIS REGION HAS BEEN CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE MOST
 INACCESSIBLE. THE (DZHADRAN) HIGH MOUNTAIN RIDGE AND THE WESTERN
 SPURS OF SPIN GHAR BLOCK IT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY.
 AT THE SAME TIME, THE ABSENCE OF ANY SIGNIFICANT NATURAL BARRIERS
 ALONG THE BORDER WITH PAKISTAN RENDERS THE KHOWST VALLEY A
 CONVENIENT CHANNEL FOR THE ENTRY OF COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY GANGS
 INTO THE DRA FROM THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRY. THE DUSHMANS HERE
 ARE EVEN SUPPLIED WITH ARTILLERY AND THE BANDITS ARE HELPED BY
 FOREIGN INSTRUCTORS TO USE IT.

THERE ARE FEW ROADS IN THIS DISTRICT. THE SHORTAGE OF ROADS
 AT TIMES MAKES IT PREFERABLE TO TRANSPORT MUCH NATIONAL ECONOMIC
 FREIGHT, AND ESPECIALLY THE MOST ESSENTIAL ITEMS, BY AIR. THE
 AIR GATEWAY TO KHOWST IN NO WAY RESEMBLES A MODERN AIRPORT.
 THE AIRFIELD THERE IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT IN AFGHANISTAN:
 A PACKED-EARTH RUNWAY, CLOSE PROXIMITY OF MOUNTAINS, MINIMUM
 AVAILABILITY OF RADAR EQUIPMENT. IN ADDITION, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL
 FOR AIRCRAFT AND HELICOPTERS TO COME UNDER FIRE FROM DUSHMANS.
 EACH FLIGHT MISSION THERE DEMANDS HIGH PROFESSIONAL SKILL AND
 COURAGE.

BUT HARSHIPS DO NOT STOP THE AFGHAN PILOTS AND TRANSPORT FLIERS
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FROM THE SOVIET LIMITED MILITARY CONTINGENT. THEY KNOW THAT THE PEOPLE OF KHOWST ARE WAITING FOR THE FREIGHT BROUGHT TO THEM BY THE AN-12'S AND AN-26'S. WHILE THE WEATHER PERMITS IT IS NECESSARY TO BUILD UP STOCKS OF FOOD, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, AND WARM CLOTHING.

...TO START WITH, THE FLIGHT CARRIED OUT BY THE CREW OF THE AN-12 SOVIET TRANSPORT FROM KABUL TO KHOWST AND BACK WAS ALMOST IN NO WAY DIFFERENT FROM DOZENS OF PREVIOUS ONES. THEIR LANDING PUNCTILIOUSLY OBSERVED ALL THE STRICT LANDING CONDITIONS ESTABLISHED FOR KHOWST AIRFIELD. AS USUAL, THEY TAXIED TO THE STAND WHERE THE VEHICLES WERE WAITING FOR THEM. UNLOADING STARTED WITHOUT DELAY. CAPTAIN VIKTOR TSARALOV, THE AIRCRAFT COMMANDER, WAS IN CHARGE. TO START WITH, THEY UNLOADED THE MATTRESSES AND BLANKETS FROM THE TAIL END OF THE AIRCRAFT. THEN CAME THE TURN OF THE GASOLINE. THE FIRST TANK, HELD BY STEEL ROPES BENEATH THE CRANE JIB, MOVED SLOWLY DOWN THE HOLD TOWARD THE TAIL GATE. A FEW SECONDS MORE, AND LIEUTENANT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES KONSTANTIN GEORGIADI, CREW TECHNICIAN FOR AVIATION LANDING EQUIPMENT, WOULD HAVE LET IT DOWN ONTO THE BACK OF A TRUCK. THE AFGHAN LOADING WORKERS WERE ALREADY STRETCHING THEIR HANDS TOWARD IT.

RIGHT AT THAT MOMENT THERE WAS AN UNEXPECTED EXPLOSION. A GREY-BLACK PLUME OF SMOKE AND DUST ROSE ABOUT 300 METERS AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT.

"DON'T STOP!", THE CREW COMMANDER ORDERED.

RIGHT THEN THE TRUCK'S BODY SETTLED UNDER THE TWO-TON WEIGHT OF THE TANK.

THE SECOND AND THIRD SHELLS FELL ONE NEXT TO THE OTHER, A MATTER OF METERS AWAY. SPLINTERS HAILED DOWN ON THE AIRCRAFT FUSELAGE. THE COMMANDER FELT A DULL PAIN IN HIS RIGHT SIDE AND JUST ABOUT MANAGED TO STAY ON HIS FEET. ENSIGN NIKOLAY PONOMARENKO, SENIOR FLIGHT RADIO OPERATOR, GASPED WITH PAIN.

"LET'S TAKE OFF!" CAME THE ORDER FROM CAPT TSARALOV, WHO RUSHED INTO THE COCKPIT THROUGH THE ESCAPE HATCH, CLUTCHING THE SPLINTER WOUND ON HIS SIDE WITH HIS LEFT HAND.

INFURIATED, OVERCOMING THE PAIN IN HIS FOOT WHICH HAD BEEN SHOT TO PIECES BY THE SPLINTER, ENSIGN NIKOLAY PONOMARENKO, SENIOR FLIGHT RADIO OPERATOR ON BOARD, HURRIED TOWARD LIEUTENANT ALEKSEY LOGINOV, ASSISTANT COMMANDER OF THE AIRCRAFT, WHO HAD FALLEN BENEATH IT. THE NAVIGATOR, SENIOR LIEUTENANT ALEKSANDR STRETOVICH, AND THE SENIOR FLIGHT ENGINEER, SENIOR LIEUTENANT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES LEV KALYAGIN, GOT THERE BEFORE HIM. THEY PICKED UP THEIR COMRADE'S LISTLESS BODY....

AS IT BECAME CLEAR LATER, CAPT TSARALOV HAD TAKEN THE ONLY CORRECT DECISION UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY COULD NOT HAVE REMAINED AT THE AIRPORT FOR A MOMENT LONGER. IF NOTH THE FOURTH, THEN THE FIFTH, SEVENTH, OR TENTH SHELL FIRED BY THE DUSHMANS WOULD HAVE HIT THE AIRCRAFT WITH THE GASOLINE TANKS IN ITS HOLD. THE AIRCRAFT COULD BE SAVED ONLY BY GETTING OUT OF THERE. BUT THE COMMANDER WAS WOUNDED. HE COULD NOT MOVE HIS RIGHT HAND. THE ASSISTANT COMMANDER WAS LYING MOTIONLESS. AND YET THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY OUT. ALL HOPES WERE RESTING WITH HIM, THE COMMANDING OFFICER.

IT WAS A MATTER OF SECONDS. ALL CREW MEMBERS WHO WERE STILL ON
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THEIR FEET URGENTLY (THE FIRE WAS STILL CONTINUING) PREPARED
THE AIRCRAFT FOR TAKE-OFF.

LT A. LOGINOV'S HEART WAS BEATING ITS LAST. THE RADIO OPERATOR
WAS STRUGGLING TO RETAIN CONSCIOUSNESS. A SOVIET OFFICER, WHO HAD
JUMPED INTO THE AIRCRAFT WITH THE CREW AND REMAINS, UNFORTUNATELY,
UNKNOWN, WAS APPLYING A TOURNIQUET ON THE OPERATOR'S LEG, WHICH WAS
SPURTING BLOOD, WITH HIS PANTS BELT. THIS OFFICER WAS ON HIS WAY
TO KABUL. NOW IT IS HARD TO SAY WHAT MADE HIM JUMP INTO THE
AIRCRAFT INSTEAD OF THE SHELTER, WHERE HE COULD HAVE WAITED OUT
THE SHELLING AND FLOWN TO THE DRA CAPITAL UNDER CALMER CONDITIONS
ON ANOTHER FLIGHT. BUT HE FLEW WITH THE CREW WHICH HAD
SUFFERED FIVE CASUALTIES OUT OF A TOTAL OF EIGHT MEMBERS. HE FLEW
WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT NEED HIS HELP. AND HE DID GIVE HIS HELP,
BOTH IN THE AIRCRAFT AND LATER, AFTER LANDING IN KABUL, HELPING
TO SEND THE INJURED TO HOSPITAL. AND AFTERWARDS, UNNOTICED BY
ANYONE, UNKNOWN, HE MADE HIS WAY FROM THE AIRPORT TO THE CITY WHERE
HIS BUSINESS AWAITED HIM.

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<> REF PM091406 MOSCOW <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><> RUSSIAN 8 JAN///BUSINESS
AWAITED HIM.

<> TAKE 2 OF 2 -- <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><>: REBELS KILL USSR AIRMAN IN DRA
AIRFIELD ATTACK

PM091407

((TEXT)) AT TAKE-OFF THE COMMANDER DEMANDED FROM HIS AIRCRAFT
EVERYTHING OF WHICH IT WAS CAPABLE. AND IT DID NOT LET HIM DOWN,
DESPITE THE DAMAGE IT HAD SUFFERED. AT KABUL AIRPORT THEY
DISCOVERED ABOUT 150 HOLES IN THE WINGS AND THE FUSELAGE, THE
COCKPIT HAD BECOME DECOMPRESSED, AND THE DRAG LINK FROM THE
RIGHT-HAND CONTROL STICK HAD BEEN DAMAGED. ONE OF THE SPLINTERS
HAD PUNCTURED A GASOLINE TANK AND THE GASOLINE HAD RUN INTO THE
HOLD. OXYGEN HAD BEEN "LEAKING" FROM THE PUNCTURED OXYGEN SYSTEM.
THE MIXTURE OF OXYGEN AND GASOLINE FUMES COULD HAVE EXPLODED AT
ANY MOMENT.

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES (ACCORDING TO OBLIGATORY RULES)
AN AIRCRAFT DOES NOT START MOVING UNTIL THE CREW HAVE STARTED
ALL FOUR ENGINES AND TESTED ALL THEIR FUNCTIONS. THIS TIME,
HOWEVER, NO SOONER HAD THE FIRST ENGINE PICKED UP REVOLUTIONS
THAN TSARALOV STARTED ROLLING TOWARD THE TAKE-OFF POSITION,
MOVING AWAY FROM THE FIRE. DURING TAXIING SENIOR LT OF TECHNICAL
SERVICES L. KALYAGIN STARTED TWO MORE ENGINES. THE LAST ONE PICKED
UP THE NECESSARY REVOLUTIONS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TAKE-OFF RUN.
WITH THE TAIL END UNLOADED, THE AIRCRAFT ACQUIRED A FORWARD
CENTER OF GRAVITY. THIS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO LIFT OFF THE FORWARD
SECTION OF THE BODY. CONTROLLING AN AIRCRAFT WITH A FORWARD CENTER
OF GRAVITY DEMANDED FROM THE PILOT MUCH GREATER PHYSICAL EFFORTS
ON THE CONTROL STICK THAN USUAL. AND TSARALOV WAS WORKING WITH
ONLY HIS LEFT HAND. THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT WITH THE RIGHT CAUSED
HIM UNBEARABLE PAIN.

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NOW TSARALOV HIMSELF CANNOT EXPLAIN IN DETAIL HOW HE AND THE SENIOR FLIGHT ENGINEER MANAGED TO MANIPULATE THE FLAPS, THE CONTROL STICK, AND THE ENGINE CONTROL LEVERS AND TO LIFT THE CRAFT, WHOSE NOSE WAS LEANING DOWN TOWARD THE GROUND, AT THE VERY END OF THE TAKE-OFF STRIP. THE AIRCRAFT BANKED SHARPLY, AVOIDING THE MOUNTAINS, REACHED THE NECESSARY HEIGHT ABOVE THE AIRFIELD, AND SET COURSE FOR KABUL.

SENIOR RADIO OPERATOR N. PONOMARENKO, WEAKENED BY THE LOSS OF BLOOD, WAS UNABLE TO SWITCH ON THE ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT WHEN THE ENGINES STARTED. HE WAS REPLACED BY LT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES K. GEORGIADI, CREW TECHNICIAN FOR AVIATION LANDING EQUIPMENT, WHO ALSO HAD A SPLINTER IN HIS LEG. GEORGIADI'S POST WAS TAKEN BY THE SENIOR AIRCRAFT GUNNER, ENSIGN NIKOLAY KAROLIN AND THE AIRCRAFT MECHANIC, PRIVATE BEKHTIYAR OTARBAYEV, WHO CONSIDERED HIS OWN WOUND TO BE A MERE SCRATCH. THERE THEY WERE -- WELL-COORDINATED AND INTERCHANGEABLE CREW MEMBERS, CAPABLE OF ACTING WITH REDUCED NUMBERS!

BEFORE TAKEOFF AND IN THE AIR EACH CREW MEMBER WHO WAS ABLE TO FUNCTION WORKED FOR TWO. KARELIN AND OTARBAYEV MANAGED AT THE START OF THE TAKEOFF RUN TO VERY QUICKLY SECURE THE GASOLINE TANKS FROM WHICH THE SECURING WEBBING HAD BEEN REMOVED DURING THE UNLOADING OPERATIONS. THIS PREVENTED A SHIFT OF THE FREIGHT DURING THE RUN AND, OF COURSE, AN UNEXPECTED SHIFT IN THE TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT'S CENTER OF GRAVITY....

THE AIRCRAFT FLEW TO KABUL AIRPORT WITHOUT BEING IN CONTACT WITH THE GROUND. THE MAIN RADIO WAS SILENT: PONOMARENKO WAS UNABLE TO OPERATE IT. ONLY ON THE APPROACH TO KABUL AIRPORT, WHEN DISTANCE AND CONDITIONS ENABLED CAPT TSARALOV TO ESTABLISH CONTACT ON HIS UHF RADIO, WAS THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT GIVEN ORDERS TO PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE DAMAGED AIRCRAFT....

AFTERWARDS THE COMMANDER SPOKE ABOUT HIS LANDING WITH HIS CUSTOMARY BREVITY:

"WE MADE A DIRECT APPROACH TO KABUL. WE APPROACHED THE RUNWAY FROM A DISTANCE FOUR TIMES SHORTER THAN NORMAL.... AND LANDED WITH A SHARP LEFT TURN."

THIS IS HOW OFFICER YU. KRAVCHENKO, AN EXPERIENCED TRANSPORT PILOT, ASSESSES THE FLIGHT:

"I PAY TRIBUTE TO THE CREW'S COURAGE. BUT WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY THE AIRCRAFT COMMANDER IS, WITHOUT ANY EXAGGERATION, A REAL COMEAT FEAT. HE TOOK A DECISION WHICH CAN BE SAID TO HAVE BEEN FEASIBLE ONLY NOW, WHEN THE DEED HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. BUT ANY OTHER DECISION WOULD HAVE RESULTED IN A TRAGIC END."

YES, A LOFTY FEAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY COMMUNIST CAPT V. TSARALOV AND HIS CREW, WORTHILY EXECUTING THEIR INTERNATIONAL DUTY. A FEAT FOR THE SAKE OF THE AFGHANS' PEACEFUL AND HAPPY LIFE.

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